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## STEPHANIE FELDMAN-ALEONG: A LEGACY OF LOVE AND LOYALTY

ANTHONY NIEDWIECKI<sup>1</sup>

Stephanie Aleong was a teacher, scholar, lawyer, prosecutor, aunt, sister, wife, and daughter. But to so many of us, she was a friend. Stephanie was not the usual friend or acquaintance. She was a person who was constantly pulling for you, supporting you and fighting for you. Stephanie really represented what we all want in a friend—someone who is compassionate, loyal, and generous. Stephanie was all of these things to me, and she is sorely missed everyday because of it.

To say that Stephanie was compassionate is an understatement, but I can think of no other way to describe how she treated people. Stephanie was most compassionate when dealing with her students at Nova. Whenever a student had a crisis, regardless of whether the student had a real crisis such as an illness or a typical law school crisis of making a mistake in class, everyone knew they could go to Professor Aleong for advice, support, and help. I cannot count the times that I have heard students say how many hours she spent helping those who were in need. Many students saw her as a motherly figure, which is surprising given that she was one of the youngest faculty members at Nova! Her firm advice with that gentle touch was exactly what each student needed and sought from her. They knew that when they needed a shoulder to cry on or advice on how to deal with some problem at home, they could count on Professor Aleong to deal with them compassionately and without judgment.

Nowhere was Stephanie's compassion more evident than when she was dealing with her own cancer. At a time when she should have focused on her own health and well-being, she reached out to others who were suffering from cancer. She was a regular on the cancer blogs and message boards, offering support and love to complete strangers. Stephanie provided quiet support to those in the Nova family that were also suffering from cancer. I did not know how much friendship and love she provided to so many people at Nova that were sick until after she passed away. To this day, I do not know how she had the time to help so many people, be the great professor and scholar she was, provide support for her family and friends, and still sleep! What's more, she did it all with a smile. Stephanie believed that she

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1. Anthony Niedwiecki, Associate Professor of Law, Director of the Lawyering Skills and Values Program, Nova Southeastern University. In addition to being a colleague, Professor Niedwiecki was a close friend of Professor Aleong.

was put on this earth to help others, and everything she did in her life was geared toward fulfilling that goal. Her life may have been short, but she did more to help people in those years than most people do in much longer lives.

Her compassion made her one of the most loyal people I know. I always knew that I would have Stephanie's support no matter how tough times got. If Stephanie disagreed with me, she would do so in her own sweet, but firm way without anyone else knowing. As soon as we were in public, she stood by me forcefully and strongly. I always knew she had my back. Again, her loyalty also extended to her students. I know of no stronger advocate for our students than Stephanie. She pushed them to do their best and had faith that everyone could succeed. The more difficult the student, the harder she pushed. She was truly a teacher and mentor to every student she encountered. Her loyalty to the Moot Court Honor Society is still an example of how any professor should help a student organization. She spent countless hours working with students and doing whatever she could to make the program the best it could be. Her imprint on the program will be felt for so many years to come.

Her compassion and loyalty are only overshadowed by her generosity. In fact, her compassion and loyalty were most likely developed by her generosity. I know of no other person in my life that has given more to so many without asking for anything in return. Again, the amount of time she spent with her students and colleagues went well beyond what anyone could possibly expect. The love she showed to each of her family members and friends was immeasurable. Each person who came into her life felt like he or she was the most important person to Stephanie because that is how she made each of us feel. When I was around Stephanie, I thought I was the only person who mattered to her. Stephanie would also give me small gifts that would capture a special or funny moment that we shared together. To this day, I chuckle when I see the tissue box she gave me that says "judicial relief," knowing that we shared many stories about students crying in our offices around the middle of each semester.

I know of no story, however, that captures Stephanie's compassion, loyalty and generosity more than when she helped me with a campaign event one day. Stephanie was one of my biggest supporters when I decided to run for office, but nothing compares to the day she walked with me in a parade only a couple weeks after having surgery to remove some of her cancer. I never asked her to come, but she heard me say how excited I was about my first parade as a candidate. The morning of the parade, she called and said that she was bringing her dogs to walk with me and my family at the parade. Before I knew it, Stephanie was at the parade wearing her campaign shirt and walking her dogs. We walked almost three miles in the sun and heat, with Stephanie constantly smiling and handing out candy to the children. Never

once did she complain, although I know that she was still very sore from her surgery. We tried to get her to ride in the car, but she refused. She just said that she wanted to support her friend. That is what captures this great woman—a loyal, compassionate and generous friend to all. I know I speak for so many people touched by Stephanie when I say: “Thank you Professor Aleong. We truly miss you, but your example of compassion, loyalty and generosity will always live on.”

